

Moving Nature Tourism Forward in the Pine Mountain Region

**Summary of Findings from the
Pine Mountain Ecotourism Roundtable
Nov. 8, 2002**



**Prepared by
The Kentucky Environmental Quality Commission
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Commonwealth of Kentucky

Paul E. Patton, Governor



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Bringing together state, local and community leaders to generate ideas about how to move nature tourism forward in the Pine Mountain region in a manner that will:

- Strengthen and diversify local economies,
- Bring in new jobs and businesses, and
- Increase tax revenues,
- While building community pride, protecting fragile resources and improving the quality of life for residents.

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Contents

I.	Introduction.	3
II.	Nature Tourism in the Pine Mountain Region -Taking Stock.	4
1.	Nature Tourism – What is It?	4
2.	What is the Demand for Nature-Based Tourism?.	4
3.	What Does the Pine Mountain Region Have to Offer?.	6
4.	What is Already in Place that the Region can Build On?..	7
5.	What is Holding the Region Back?.	10
6.	What is Needed to Move the Region Forward?	13
III.	A Pine Mountain Nature Tourism Initiative.	14
1.	Where to Start?.	14
a.	Formalize Leadership Structure	14
b.	Develop a Regional Strategic Plan.	14
2.	Who Should Step Forward?.	14
3.	What Else is Needed to Get the Job Done?.	16
4.	What is the Bottom Line?	16
Appendix A		
Pine Mountain Roundtable Participants.		17
Appendix B		
Questions and Answers.		21

I. Introduction

The Pine Mountain region of southeastern Kentucky holds great promise and opportunity to further support nature tourism. The recent passage of a bill to create the 120-mile long Pine Mountain Trail State Park and numerous other attractions including the Pine Mountain Settlement School, Blanton Old-Growth Forest, Kentucky Coal Mining Museum, Little Shepherd Trail and the Pine Mountain State Resort Park offers unique tourism adventures vested in the region's heritage, biodiversity, environment, culture, aesthetics and unique sense of place.

The Kentucky Environmental Quality Commission (EQC) and the Pine Mountain Settlement School convened a roundtable in Harlan County on Nov. 8, 2002 to bring together state, local and community leaders to generate ideas about how to move nature tourism forward in the region in a manner that will:

- Strengthen and diversify local economies,
- Bring in new jobs and businesses, and
- Increase tax revenues, while
- Building community pride, protecting fragile resources and improving the quality of life for residents.

EQC and the Pine Mountain Settlement School invited federal, state, regional and local interests to participate in this by-invitation roundtable. The half-day roundtable was attended by 60 people including mayors; county judges-executive; state legislators; cabinet secretaries and state agency staff; local, regional, and state tourism officials; vendors; academic, investment, conservation and coal interests; and natural resource, wildlife and heritage managers (APPENDIX A).

This paper represents a summary of ideas that emerged from the roundtable and comments received from a wide range of stakeholders. This report is intended to serve as a working paper to support efforts underway in the region to build a strong nature-based tourism economy in the Pine Mountain region. This paper was prepared by Leslie Cole, director, Kentucky Environmental Quality Commission, with the review and input of the members of Pine Mountain Roundtable. EQC also provided an opportunity for Roundtable members to submit individual comments which are included in Appendix B. EQC would like to express special thanks to Ewell Balltrip, director, Kentucky Appalachian Commission; Nancy Adams, director, Pine Mountain Settlement School; Terina Widner-Collins, Tri-Cities Main Street Director of Lynch, Cumberland and Benham; Carole Summers, Tourism Development Cabinet; Jane Eller, director, Kentucky Environmental Education Council and Hugh Archer, commissioner, Kentucky Department for Natural Resources, for their assistance with the roundtable. EQC would also like to recognize the late James E. Bickford, secretary of the Kentucky Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, whose commitment to the region was the inspiration for this roundtable.

II. Nature Tourism in the Pine Mountain Region

Taking Stock

"I am convinced there is a definite role for nature-based tourism here. The best tourism you have comes from the bottom up. You all have to decide what you want and how you want it."

Ann Latta, secretary, Tourism Development Cabinet

Remarks at the Nov. 8 Pine Mountain Ecotourism Roundtable

1. Nature Tourism—What Is It?

What is ecotourism? This issue was among many items discussed at the Nov. 8 Pine Mountain roundtable. Several participants viewed ecotourism as outdoor recreation such as camping, hiking and sightseeing. Others included off-road vehicles and hunting/fishing as part of nature tourism. Still others suggested that ecotourism encompasses heritage and cultural activities, crafts and other attractions that make the Pine Mountain region unique.

Experts agree that nature tourism has broadened to include many nature-based and cultural heritage activities. It encompasses the geographical character of a place and the entire combination of nature and human attributes that makes a place worth visiting. It is tourism that sustains and enhances the character of the place being visited – its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and well being of its residents.¹

Several participants at the roundtable expressed the need to develop nature tourism in the region in a balanced manner in order to protect its natural assets. Few advocated support for large theme-based attractions or amusement parks. The need to better define what type of tourism is suitable or appropriate for the region and seek consensus on how best to achieve it is critical if tourism is to move forward in a balanced and sustainable manner.

2. What is the Demand for Nature-Based Tourism?

Speakers and participants at the Pine Mountain roundtable reviewed the potential role of nature tourism in the region including the following facts:

- Travel and tourism generates \$541 billion in direct expenditures and 7.8 million jobs in the U.S. In Kentucky, tourism is the state's third largest industry generating \$900 million in state and local taxes and exceeding \$8.7 billion in economic impacts. The industry supports in excess of 161,000 jobs.
- 62 percent of all U.S. adults took a trip to a small town or village in the U.S. within the past three years. This translates to 86.8 million U.S. adults.²
- Nature travel is estimated to be increasing at an annual rate between 10 and 30 percent a year.

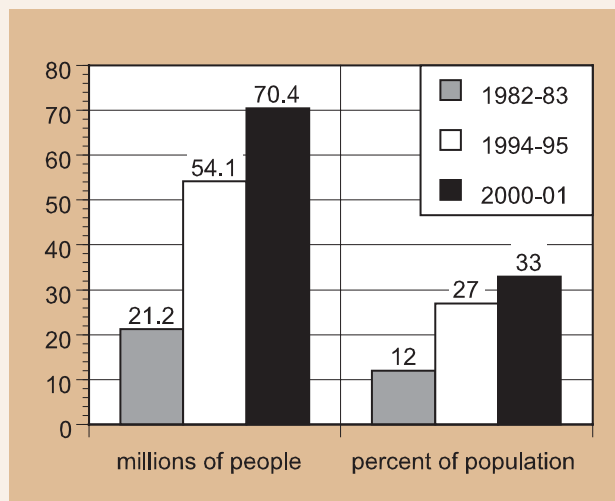
¹ As defined by Jonathan B. Tourtellot, Director of Sustainable Tourism, National Geographic Society

² According to a 2001 travel poll by the Travel Industry Association of America.

- Nature activities such as birding, watching wildlife and viewing scenery/natural vegetation are among the most rapidly growing types of adventure travel.
- Nature tourists spend on average \$138 per person a day.
- Tourists are willing to spend an additional \$202 per person, but they want authentically made/high quality locally made products such as quilts, pottery and furniture.
- The average travel time to a tourist destination is six hours. The Pine Mountain region has a population of five million within a six-hour drive and another three million just outside of this area.
- The typical nature tourist is a well-educated 52-year-old person from an urban or suburban area.

Trends reveal that nature tourism is growing. There is a strong interest in the outdoors among Americans, according to Mary Jeanne Packer a consultant with the national nature consultant tourism firm of Fermata. She indicated that a *Ducks Unlimited* survey revealed that 44 percent of Americans participated in some level of birding and 55 percent reported viewing wildlife while away from home. A national survey also found that the number of Americans that partake in bird watching increased from 21 million to 70 million in the past 20 years.

Bird Watching Trends in the United States³



These facts speak well for Kentucky and the Pine Mountain region. Nature-based tourism is booming, according to national and state experts. People are now looking to rediscover our country. “These things work in Kentucky’s favor and we will start to see some of this growth ourselves,” Kentucky Tourism Development Cabinet Secretary Ann Latta told roundtable members. Tourism generated \$13 million in Harlan County alone in 1999 – up from \$5 million in 1996, according to Latta. The region must take advantage of this market in order to grow the nature tourism economy in the Pine Mountain region.

³ *National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE): 2000-2002*. The Interagency National Survey Consortium, Coordinated by the USDA Forest Service, Recreation, Wilderness and Demographics Trends Research Group, Athens, GA and the Human Dimensions Research Laboratory, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tenn.

Pine Mountain Primary Trade Area Travel Expenditures (1999)⁴

County	Expenditures	county rank	employment
Bell	57 million	22	1,428
Harlan	13 million	60	163
Letcher	6 million	69	312
Pike	44 million	26	980
Total	121 million		2,883

3. What Does the Pine Mountain Region Have to Offer?

Breathtaking views, early homesteads, old stone walls built by Civil War soldiers, upland bog areas, unique geological formations, wild turkey, white-tailed deer and unusual wildflowers and other plants are among the many attractions offered in the Pine Mountain region.

Pine Mountain Region Attractions

Ecotourism – Blanton Forest, Lilly Cornet Woods, Bad Branch Falls, Stone Mountain, Pine Mountain Trail, Black Mountain, Little Shepherd Trail

Coal Mining History – Kentucky Coal Mining Museum, Portal 31, Bell County Coal Mining Museum, Benham School House Inn, coal mining towns of Lynch, Benham and Cumberland

Appalachian Culture – Pine Mountain Settlement School, SECC Appalachian Center, Wendover, Henderson Settlement School, Hensley Settlement

Arts and Crafts – Red Bird Mission, Mountain Crafts Gallery, Oven Forks Mercantile, Pine Mountain Co-op

Outdoor Recreation – Daniel Boone National Forest, Kingdom Come State Park, Cumberland Gap National Historic Park, Pine Mountain State Resort Park, Kentenia State Forest, State Wildlife Management Areas (Cranks Creek, Shillalah, Kentucky Ridge, Begley, Martin Fork Lake), Martin Fork Lake

It is these and other types of attractions that place the region in a prime position to target nature tourists. Mary Jeanne Packer, a national nature tourism consultant, told the roundtable members that Kentucky, particularly eastern Kentucky and the Pine Mountain region, are what tourists are looking for. Consider these facts:

- 76 percent of U.S. travelers would like to visit “someplace they have never been before.”
- 48 percent are interested in a destination that is “remote and untouched.”
- 57 percent are attracted by an area’s “culture.”
- 44 percent would like to “learn a new skill or engage in a new activity” during their trip.

⁴ 1999 Travel Research by Kentucky Tourism Development Cabinet

Typically people think that major attractions such as amusement parks and sporting events comprise the core of the tourism industry, Packer noted. While these attractions have an important role in the tourism industry, they only make up 9 percent and 6 percent respectively of the activities of domestic travelers. In contrast, outdoor recreation, historical places and parks combined make up 41 percent of the travel activities on in the U.S, according to the Travel Industry Association of America.

Pine Mountain Region Visitors (1999)¹

Pine Mountain State Resort Park	123,517
Ky. Coal Mining Museum	30,000
Cumberland Gap National Park	1,000,000
Lily Cornett Woods	1,200
Kingdom Come State Park	38,425
School House Inn	annual occupancy at 80 percent

4. What is Already in Place that the Region Can Build On?

There are a number of programs and initiatives that support tourism development from which the Pine Mountain region can build on. Several communities in the region have created tourism commissions and have developed tourism plans. The Southern and Eastern Kentucky Tourism Initiative was established in 2000 to provide a tourism development blueprint for the area. And the PRIDE program has strengthened efforts to address environmental problems such as open dumping and wastewater treatment in the region while renewing local pride in a 40-county region of eastern Kentucky.

- **Community Tourism Commissions**

Several communities have established local tourism commissions to promote tourism in local areas. For example, the Cumberland Tourist and Convention Commission is a non-profit organization that promotes tourism in the Tri-Cities of Benham, Lynch and Cumberland through creative programming and marketing of the area's unique Kentucky mountain heritage. The group also manages a Web site. The Harlan County Tourist and Convention Commission provides information about area attractions. These commissions typically sponsor activities such as festivals and the arts. These commissions are also know to make investments in area tourist attractions.

⁵ 1999 Travel Research by Kentucky Tourism Development Cabinet

- **Southern and Eastern Kentucky Regional Tourism Initiative**
 In September 2000, U.S. Rep. Hal Rogers of Kentucky's 5th Congressional District formed a partnership with Kentucky's Secretary of Tourism Development Cabinet, Ann Latta. Together they unveiled the "Company's Coming" tourism development initiative for southern and eastern Kentucky. The Southern and Eastern Kentucky Tourism Development Association (SEKTDA) is charged with implementing a regional plan designed to provide a five-year framework for tourism development. The plan focuses on eight corridors with teams consisting of counties, cities, tourism organizations, historical societies and local businesses.
- **Kentucky Appalachian Community Development Initiative**
 This program was initiated in 1997 with the goal of helping Kentucky Appalachian communities develop a sustainable economy. The program is in large part an initiative that provides a management tool to gain the maximum benefit from the resources available for development activities. Cumberland, Benham and Lynch in Harlan County are among the communities participating in the program.
- **Kentucky Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategic Plan**
 Prepared by the Kentucky Tourism Development Cabinet and the Education, Arts and Humanities Cabinet in 2000, this state plan focuses on building interagency coordination, establishing an information network among state, regional and private agencies to support cultural heritage tourism activities, create community awareness campaigns and encourage product development through education and incentive programs.
- **Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources Wildlife Projects**
 The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources reintroduced elk in 1997 as part of a restoration project. Approximately 1,500 elk have been transported into Kentucky in the last five years. Reproduction has been very high, as approximately 90 of the adult cows have produced calves. Currently, the estimated elk population in Kentucky is 2,400 animals and will grow to about 3,300 by mid-summer 2003. It is considered the largest, free-ranging herd in the eastern U.S. Elk bugling tours are being offered by the Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources and others. These tours generally fill up within days of announcement. Hawk Watch Weekend was also recently established in the vicinity of Pine Mountain. This type of event is a large tourist attraction in states like Pennsylvania.
- **PRIDE – Personal Responsibility in a Desirable Environment**
 U.S. Rep. Harold "Hal" Rogers of Kentucky's 5th Congressional District and the late Kentucky Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Cabinet Secretary James Bickford announced the PRIDE initiative in the summer of 1997. PRIDE is the first comprehensive, regionwide, local/state/federal

cooperative effort designed to address the serious challenge of cleaning up the region's rivers and streams of sewage and garbage, ending illegal trash dumps and promoting environmental awareness and education while renewing pride in southern and eastern Kentucky. Since 1997, Rogers has secured over \$66.1 million in federal funding through the [National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration](#) for various PRIDE projects and activities.

- **Local Tourism Planning Initiatives**

There are several projects underway in the region to support tourism development including the following:

- **Pine Mountain Trail State Park.** This state park was created by the legislature in 2002. The Pine Mountain Trail Conference and the Tourism Development Cabinet are working to acquire property for the 120-mile linear state park and plan for its development and use.
- **Blanton Forest.** Efforts are underway to support and provide for the long-term stewardship of Blanton Forest, an old-growth forest covering 2,350 acres of Pine Mountain's south slope in Harlan County. Blanton Forest is a diverse ecological treasure first recognized in 1992. It is the 13th largest old growth forest in the eastern U.S. and has been designated a state nature preserve. A visitor plan has been drafted. Positive response to the preservation of Blanton Forest has led Kentucky Natural Lands Trust to embark on a project to preserve and protect an entire ecologic and migratory corridor of Pine Mountain.
- **Community Tourism Plans.** Some communities in the Pine Mountain region have developed tourism plans. For example, Harlan County has developed a plan with a number of goals including developing a countywide approach to tourism and working to develop Blanton Forest, Pine Mountain Trail, Stone Mountain and other nature and recreational tourism opportunities.

- **Other Programs**

There are a number of other initiatives and programs underway in the region that can lend support to a nature tourism initiative including:

- **Main Street Programs.** This program works to revitalize historic main streets in communities across the region in a way to bring traditional main streets back to life for residents and visitors alike. Since 1979, this program has been a successful addition toward reversing the economic decline in Kentucky's downtowns, both small and large. Participation in this program requires local commitment and financial support. A Main Street manager administers the program locally through a volunteer board. The Kentucky Heritage Council provides technical and design assistance, on-site visits, a resource center, national consultants and grant funding.

- **Renaissance Kentucky.** This program was created in 1996 to assist communities with downtown revitalization efforts. This initiative is designed to bring together communities and the resources necessary to revitalize and restore Kentucky’s downtowns. To accomplish Renaissance Kentucky goals, an alliance of four state agencies and three private entities dedicated to assisting Kentucky’s communities was formed. The program has received \$15 million through federal and state transportation funding.
- **Environmental Education.** The Pine Mountain Settlement School provides environmental education opportunities to schoolchildren. Recently, the school has expanded its outreach to provide adult education opportunities focused on skills and crafts.

5. *What is Holding the Region Back?*

The Pine Mountain Region has much to offer tourists and the traveling public. So what is holding the region back from growing its nature tourism economy? Roundtable participants identified several barriers to moving nature tourism in the region forward.

• **Fragmentation of Leadership and Efforts**

What was said . . .

“We all need to be on the same page, work hard together and get on the map.”

“We must convince local and state leaders that projects like this must take place.”

Several participants expressed the lack of integrated leadership in the region and how this has affected the ability to move tourism forward. In the past, communities have not had an incentive to work together in any meaningful manner. “Communities tend to compete for tourists, rather than work together to court tourists,” according to one roundtable member. Efforts to develop corridor teams under the auspices of SEKTDA to promote tourism in southeastern Kentucky were applauded. Participants expressed the need to build on this initiative and develop a more concerted and coordinated approach to promote nature tourism in the Pine Mountain region.

• **Lack of Awareness of the Role Nature Tourism Can Play**

What was said . . .

“Tourism jobs are seen as seasonal and low paying by local officials.”

“We need state/local buy-in of the need for nature tourism.”

“Our local officials are well-meaning, but they have not grasped the ecotourism concept.”

Roundtable participants expressed concern about the general lack of knowledge and commitment by state and local leaders and economic development officials regarding nature tourism and the role it can play in diversifying the region's economy. The spin-off job and business opportunities such as bed and breakfasts, crafts, restaurants and retail stores are not viewed as part of the larger nature tourism picture. As such, tourism development has become a low priority in many communities in eastern Kentucky and has received limited attention by the Kentucky Economic Development Cabinet and other state agencies. The region needs to build a strong constituency that understands what nature tourism is and what it can contribute to economic development, conservation of natural resources, education opportunities and improved quality of life for its residents.

- **Lack of Integrated Planning and Marketing**

What was said . . .

"What we have here is real – built from within and we want to keep it that way."

"We must capitalize on what we have to offer while protecting it."

"We must grow in a planned, effective manner."

"I feel strongly that we need an inventory of what assets we have – the history, culture and nature-based attractions – we need to understand how these fit together and what we have to offer."

Roundtable participants expressed a need to better inventory the region's resources, identify its assets, determine what activities are desirable and set priorities. There was general agreement that the region needs to develop partnerships to promote and market the region. Strong support was expressed for a strategic plan to explore opportunities in the region based on:

- Authentic experiences.
- Theme-based trails and other nature attractions.
- Ecological classrooms.
- Sustainable products.
- Variety of related markets.
- Heritage/beauty of the area.

It was suggested that the Pine Mountain Trail State Park could serve as a centerpiece of the Pine Mountain region's strategy with a variety of complementary recreational and other activities along the corridor. The opportunity for the region to serve as an environmental/ecological classroom was mentioned as a huge potential market attracting scientists, naturalists, environmentalists and others to Pine Mountain.

- **Inadequate Visitor Service Infrastructure**

What was said . . .

“We need to make sure tourists will receive the kind of experiences and amenities they want.”

“People want a cabin to stay in – they don’t want to go to the Best Western.”

“We need people trained to handle the jobs that ecotourism creates.”

“If we provide something they are interested in they will come back for generations – we need a sustainable infrastructure for generations.”

Many of the attractions in the region lack the basic visitor infrastructure to meet current and future needs. The attractions in the region vary in terms of on-site facilities amenities, services and purpose. Several roundtable participants cited lodging as a critical need in the region. Roundtable participants also discussed the need for visitor centers (portals) and additional attractions such as birding trails and wildlife viewing areas for bear and elk. Participants generally agreed that the region needs assistance in determining what kinds of visitor services are needed, the quality of those attractions and appropriate job training.

- **Insufficient Investment**

What was said . . .

“The state has not invested in tourism like we do in commercial baseball and football stadiums—yet the potential for revenue and jobs is far greater for nature tourism.”

“Nature-based tourism is booming—we need to take advantage of all funding opportunities.”

“Scarce dollars have become an issue—some cities are better able to bring in dollars leading to infighting and turf battles.”

Tourism is one of Kentucky’s largest and fastest growing industries. The statewide economic impact exceeded \$8.7 billion in 2001. Payroll income alone in the last decade has increased 24.7 percent generating over \$2 billion. Kentucky tourism economy has experienced a 65 percent growth within the last decade. But, tourism is not growing as fast in Kentucky as it is in other states. The reason may be that Kentucky does not invest as much in tourism. A 2000-2001 comparative analysis of tourism budgets throughout the U.S. and how these funds are generated ranked Kentucky 32nd and is third from the bottom when compared to other states in the southeast region.

In the Pine Mountain region, investments do not reflect the quality or quantity of the region’s natural resources or the tremendous opportunity that nature tourism presents. The recent efforts through the Southern and Eastern Kentucky Tourism Initiative to support additional investment in eastern Kentucky are encouraging. The Pine Mountain Region must take advantage of these and other resources and leverage them to bring more investment capital into the region.

6. What is Needed to Move Tourism Forward in the Pine Mountain Region?

Moving nature tourism forward in the Pine Mountain Region will require a collaborative effort focused on:

- Leadership
- Vision
- A Strategic Plan
- Public and Private Sector Partnerships, and
- Investment

It will be necessary for the region to bring together leaders at the state, regional and local level to move this effort forward. These leaders will need to have a common vision for the region and the role nature tourism can play in supporting a stronger more vibrant economy, improving the quality of life for communities and conserving the integrity of the region's culture, heritage and natural resources. Once this leadership is in place, the region needs a strategic plan that identifies the region's assets, sets priorities and recruits a wide range of public and private partners to move actions forward. It will also require additional public and private investment to make these priorities a reality and promote the region as a unique travel destination.

III. A Pine Mountain Nature Tourism Initiative

The participants at the Pine Mountain Roundtable produced several ideas to move nature tourism forward in the region. Based on these ideas, a **Pine Mountain Nature Tourism Initiative** is presented below to provide further discussion and action. It is hoped that this initiative could also serve as a **model** for other regions within Kentucky to build a strong and vibrant nature tourism economy.

1. Where to Start?

A. Formalize Leadership Structure

A specific regional leadership entity (council/alliance) needs to be created within the Pine Mountain region and given the responsibility of developing a common vision, coordinating development efforts and advancing nature tourism in the region. The governor, the Kentucky Tourism Development Cabinet, the Pine Mountain Settlement School, the Kentucky Appalachian Commission and the Southern and Eastern Kentucky Tourism Development Association are among those who should provide guidance and help support a regional leadership group composed of local leaders and interested parties.

B. Develop a Regional Strategic Plan

One of the first responsibilities of the regional leadership group would be to develop a strategic plan. The planning process should reach out to a wide range of stakeholders. A third party (university, planner, consultant) may be needed to work with partners to assist with the development of a strategic plan for the region. Key elements of the plan as identified by roundtable participants include:

- Define the region
- Inventory of resources and stakeholders
- Nature-based tourism strategies, priorities, actions and tactics
- Funding opportunities and options
- Cooperative venture partnerships
- Marketing tactics
- Technical assistance and training
- Business development and training
- Community education and awareness

2. Who Should Step Forward?

A Pine Mountain Nature Tourism Initiative will require strong leadership and vision if it is to advance tourism in the region. This calls for a wide range of stakeholders and partnerships at the federal, state, regional and local levels.

- **Community Stakeholders**

Local leadership must drive the Pine Mountain Tourism Initiative. Those involved in tourism, chambers of commerce, community development, investment bankers, site owners and operators, outdoor recreation outfitters, restaurants, hotel and visitor service enterprises all have a vested interest in nature tourism and its role in the region and their communities. Such an initiative must also involve naturalists as well as nature and heritage sites including the Pine Mountain Settlement School. The support and commitment of Local elected officials including mayors, magistrates, county judges-executive and legislators are also vital to the success of this initiative.

- **State Agency Stakeholders**

State government is a stakeholder in this initiative from a number of perspectives. Resources and expertise that may be available through the Tourism Development Cabinet; the Education, Arts and Humanities Cabinet; the Cabinet for Economic Development and the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Cabinet. The Executive Office of the governor could provide critical support and guidance for the development of a Pine Mountain Nature Tourism Initiative.

- **Federal Stakeholders**

U.S. Rep. Hal Rogers of Kentucky's 5th Congressional District is working to advance tourism development in the region with the recent creation of the "Company's Coming" initiative. Support from Congressman Hal Rogers is important to the success of this initiative. Other federal stakeholders include the U.S. Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Forest Service, the National Parks Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

- **Regional Stakeholders**

Regional stakeholders must also step forward. Academic institutions, tourism organizations, development districts, development corporations, corporate and private land holders along with environmental conservation natural resource coalitions bring an important perspective and broaden the effort adding additional energy, interests and resources into the process.

3. What Else is Needed to Get the Job Done?

Roundtable participants identified a number of other concerns and suggestions that deserve further attention including:

- A state or regional clearinghouse to assist the region's small nature tourism businesses.
- Using state funds to leverage additional federal, local and private dollars for nature tourism projects in the region.
- An interactive Pine Mountain Web site linking the sites in the region and promoting activities in a coordinated manner.
- Continued attention and investments in addressing environmental problems in the region (dumping, sewage, mining, drilling) through the PRIDE program and other environmental initiatives.
- Attention to unregulated growth and impacts caused by tourism through the promotion of smart growth principles.

4. What is the Bottom Line?

The Pine Mountain region offers Kentucky a unique opportunity to develop a **model regional nature tourism initiative**. With a more formal leadership structure and a guiding strategic plan, the region can become a leader in nature tourism and reap economic and quality of life benefits for its communities and the Commonwealth.

APPENDIX A
ECO TOURISM IN KENTUCKY: A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION TO MOVE
THE PINE MOUNTAIN REGION FORWARD

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APPENDIX B
ECOTOURISM IN KENTUCKY: A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION TO MOVE
THE PINE MOUNTAIN REGION FORWARD
Pine Mountain Tourism Initiative:
Questions and Responses

The Environmental Quality Commission sent a list of seven follow-up questions to a number of members of the Nov. 8 Pine Mountain Ecotourism Roundtable. The questions sought input on key elements for a Pine Mountain Tourism Initiative. Below is a summary of responses received.

What are the *Key Elements* of a Pine Mountain Nature Tourism Initiative?

1. Cooperation.
2. Sustained leadership, partnerships and investments.
3. Key areas of interest and commerce as a series of destination points.
4. Full evaluation of economic and environmental risks and benefits.
5. Local involvement, local strategic planning, local leadership.
6. Private investment.
7. State/federal agencies assume support and technical assistance role.
8. Target current available public resources.
9. Coordination of current and future efforts to spur nature tourism, development of visitor facilities, coordinated advertising campaign, development of multi-day tourist activities/ events and a focus on true nature/ecotourism (nondestructive activities).

Who should take the *Lead* in this Initiative?

1. Given the regional nature of this initiative, a state agency/government cabinet should emerge as the “initiative operating agency” with “executive leadership” function vested with locals.
2. Someone with expertise in authentic ecotourism.
3. Kentucky Appalachian Commission because it is charged with the strategic development of the Appalachian region with assistance from SEKTDA and the state.
4. Leadership must begin at the top at all levels (governor, regional leaders, county)
5. Tourism Development Cabinet with local tourism and economic development agencies/ groups.
6. Tourism Development Cabinet and SEKTDA.

How can this initiative be *Institutionalized* at the state, regional and local levels?

1. Strategic, management and marketing plans with measurable objectives.
2. SEKTDA as the umbrella institution.
3. State - place under a state organization like the Kentucky Appalachian Commission.
Regional - make a major aspect of SEKTDA’s overall strategic plan receiving same attention as other projects.
Local – promote successes in communities using “How-To” style plan.

4. Adequate leadership to support the effort is needed or it will not succeed, as it should.
5. Divide state into tourist regions with promotion through regional offices.
6. Focus on regional and local levels through a nonprofit organization created exclusively to deal with this initiative.
7. Buy-in by Tourism Development Cabinet and strong local component.

What Role/Actions are Needed from the Four Executive Level Cabinets (Natural Resources, Education, Tourism, Economic Development) to advance the Pine Mountain Nature Tourism Initiative?

1. Help craft strategic plan, identify leaders and define objectives.
2. In collaboration with governor, four cabinets should designate a person to concentrate, manage and sustain this initiative or little will be accomplished.
3. Allocate one or two employees in each of four cabinets to work together on Nature Tourism Development to identify barriers to working together, seek solutions to allow free flowing information, expedite project review and achieve higher degree of interagency cooperation.
4. Cabinets should coordinate resources and work closely with one another to avoid environmental impacts from tourism development.
5. Use existing resources in an imaginative way to support the initiative, facilitate delivery of resources to leadership and operation unit, and play the role of encourager, counselor and promoter.
6. Tourism Development Cabinet as the lead agency to facilitate coordination, fund strategic plan and expand tourism programs in the region. Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Cabinet – emphasis on efforts to address environmental degradation in the region. Education/Humanities – increased recognition of crafts and culture in the region. Economic Development – facilitate development of tourist infrastructure and provide financial incentives.

What actions are needed to Attract Capital and Investment to the region to finance the development of nature tourism businesses?

1. Marketing plan is needed to launch various nature-based activities. This will create a list of needs for private developers.
2. Attracting private capital will require sustained improvement to regional infrastructure and commitment to addressing environmental problems.
3. Good roads and infrastructure.
4. Don't see this as an issue if resources of local communities are tapped.
5. Need an inventory of needs for attractions and services. Seek development through local business people then recruit others if no interest.
6. Inform financial institutions about the financial opportunities of ecotourism.
7. Commitment from state to improve infrastructure to make it more attractive for investment.

What *Role Can Your Group/Organization/Agency Play in organizing and participating in this initiative?*

1. Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources – identify tourism opportunities, help local groups organize tours, hold workshops/training for vendors on wildlife interpretation.
2. Kentucky Heritage Conservation Fund Board – provide funds to acquire eligible lands.
3. Kentucky Highlands Investment Corp. – Employ business development activities in partnership with Southeast Community College.
4. Kentucky Appalachian Commission – assist with organizational, strategy and program planning.
5. Kentucky Nature Preserves Commission – information on biological resources to facilitate development of accurate promotional strategies/materials.